

# *Under the Greenwood Tree*

by

**Thomas Hardy**

## SETTING

Part I of the novel is entitled “Winter.” Chapter I is set in the dark woods of Mellstock, through which Dick Dewy is walking. Chapters II and III are set in Tranter Dewy’s cottage, into which the choir goes. In Chapter IV, the setting and the choir shift to the schoolhouse, where they perform several carols for Fancy Day, the young school mistress. In Chapter V, the setting changes from the schoolhouse to farmer Shiner’s place and from there into the gallery of the church, where the choir has refreshments. In Chapter VI on Christmas morning, the scene is set first in the cottage of the Dewy family, from where they go to the church and join the rest of the choir in the gallery. Chapter VII and VIII are set in the Tranter’s cottage, where a Christmas party is in progress. In Chapter IX, the setting is partly the passage outside the school, through which Dick passes. Then the scene shifts to the garden where he meets Fancy. The setting in Part I establishes the atmosphere of quiet country life with charm and humour, enlivened by Christmas festivities.

Part II is entitled “Spring.” Chapter I is set in the passage outside the school, where Dick meets Fancy. Chapters II and III are set outside the shoemaker’s workshop where the choir members meet one evening. In Chapter IV the setting shifts from the Tranter’s house, where the choir assembles, to the vicarage. Chapter V shows the scene of the choir returning homeward. In Chapter VI the scene shifts to Yalbury Wood and the keeper’s house. Chapter VII is set on the road from Yalbury Wood to Mellstock, which Dick and Fancy take to reach home. Then the scene shifts to Fancy’s house. Chapter VIII is set on the road in which Dick drives home. Thereafter, it shifts to the land post at Mellstock Cross, where a meeting between Dick and his father takes place.

Part III is entitled “Summer.” Chapter I is set on the seafront, close to the corner of Mary Street in Bedmout-Regir. This is where Dick meets Fancy before they go for a drive. Chapter II is set further along the road. Chapters III and IV are set in a garden in which Fancy and Susan are seen picking apples. Soon Dick arrives and Susan goes indoors.

Part IV is entitled ‘Autumn.’ Chapter I is set in Fancy’s home from where Dick goes rutting. Chapter II presents the scene of Dick journeying on foot to the keeper’s house at Yalbury, where he participates in honey taking. Chapter III is set on the road from Fancy’s home at Yalbury to Mellstock. Soon the scene shifts to the cottage of Elizabeth Endorfield, a witch. In chapter IV the scene shifts to Mellstock, where Geoffrey Day calls on his daughter at the school. Chapter V is set in Mellstock church where Thanksgiving is observed. In Chapter VI the scene shifts to the school, where Fancy is sitting on the window and looking out at the rain. This is where Dick and Maybold visit her. Chapter VII is set in the vicar’s house. Then it shifts through the meadows into the road, which leads in the direction of Casterbridge.

Part V is entitled “Conclusion.” In Chapter I the early summer has come again and with it Fancy’s wedding day. This chapter is set in Geoffrey’s house, which is full of visitors. Soon everybody joins the wedding procession and proceeds towards the church. After the ceremony, the wedding procession is followed. Chapter II is set *Under the Greenwood Tree*, near Geoffrey’s cottage, where a space has been cleared for dancing.

## CHARACTERS

### Major Characters

**Dick Dewy** - an honest, trustworthy, dependable and optimistic young businessman. He is a shy, but persevering lover who does not give up easily. He ultimately reaps the reward of his perseverance, winning the love of Fancy Day.

**Fancy Day** - a fanciful, frivolous, vain, and ambitious young lady, who is easily susceptible to flattery. She serves as the schoolmistress in Mellstock. She becomes temporarily infatuated with Shiner (the farmer) and Maybold (the Vicar). Finally, her true love for Dick prevails over her false infatuations.

**Reuben Dewy** - the kind, gentle, and fair-minded father of Dick Dewy. He is a born leader who organizes the Mellstock choir into a harmonious unit.

**Mr. Maybold** - the enthusiastic and intelligent vicar, who is open to new ideas. He idealizes Fancy, with whom he eventually falls in love. Later, however, he realizes that Fancy is “less an angel than a woman.”

**Geoffrey Day** - the eccentric, stubborn, and kind-hearted father of Fancy Day. On seeing his daughter suffering, his heart melts in dismay, and he readily consents to her marriage to Dick.

**Frederic Shiner** - a rich farmer of thirty-five years, who is also the Churchwarden. He is the nearest character to a ‘villain’ in the entire book. He is proud, choleric, and a bit of a coward. Fancy develops a temporary infatuation for him.

### **Minor Characters**

**Grandfather William** - the eldest of the Dewy family. The seventy-year-old man is filled with vitality and known for being a perfect gentleman. He is also humorous and kind.

**Mrs. Day** - the Tranter’s second wife, who is a practical and competent ruler of the household.

**Susan Day** - a sister of Dick, with whom Fancy Day goes into the garden for apple picking.

**Mr. Grinham** - the former Vicar of Mellstock and the predecessor of Mr. Maybold.

**Jim, Bessie and Charlie** - the other children of Mrs. Day.

**Mr. Robert Penny** - a boot and shoemaker, who is known for his moon-like spectacles and his theories on feet.

**Elias Spinks** - one of the members of the Mellstock choir, known as the intellectual sceptic of the village. He is determined to maintain his reputation of being a learned man.

**Joseph Bourman** - another member of the Mellstock choir.

**Thomas Leaf** - a semi-idiot, who is the only surviving member of a large family. He is referred to as the village ‘natural.’

**Michael Mail** - the eldest of the Mellstock choir group.

**Ledlow** - a farmer on whom the choir calls for carol-singing

**Voss** - another person on whom the choir calls for singing carols.

**Smart** - Dick’s friend whom he joins at Budmouth.

**Lizzy** - Dick’s dancing partner at the Tranter’s party.

**Mrs. Penny** - Mr. Penny’s wife, who was “concerned for her personal safety when she danced with the Tranter.” She is always interested in the affairs of the heart and is an acute judge.

**Mrs. Endorfield** - a witch of superior intelligence combined with a few harmless eccentricities. She helps Fancy's love affair.

**Mrs. Ledlow** - Farmer Ledlow's wife.

**Vicar's Mother** - the lady for whom Dick takes some swarms of bees.

**Mrs. Day** - Geoffrey Day's second wife and Fancy Day's stepmother.

**Enoch** - Geoffrey Day's trapper who assists him in the garden.

**Fancy Day's mother** - 'a teacher in a landed family's nursery, who was foolish enough to marry the keeper of the same establishment.' After her death, her sister takes care of Fancy.

**Fancy Day's aunt** - the owner of a boarding school until she becomes Mrs. Green.

**Mr. Green** - a lawyer whom Fancy Day's aunt marries.

**Johnson** - the dairyman

**John Woodward** - the man whose brother drowns in the pool.

**Grandfather James** - Dick's maternal grandfather. He lives in a cottage all by himself. He is a miser who is rather 'slovenly in his habits.'

**Mrs. Brownjohn** - a lady belonging to a fast-coming and fast-dying family.

## CONFLICT

**Protagonist** - The protagonist of the novel is Fancy Day, a pretty, intelligent, charming, and vivacious young woman, who is fundamentally sensible, loving, and affectionate. Though she is a country girl of relatively humble parentage, her education and upbringing have made her into a sophisticated lady, who is always the centre of attraction at any party. Although she dreams of elegant places, her heart is really given to country ways, as seen at her wedding when she marries Dick Dewy.

**Antagonist** - Fancy's main problem, or antagonist, in the novel is growing up to make a rational decision about choosing a husband. Because she is lovely, intelligent, and flirtatious, all the young bachelors are attracted to her. Since she has a tendency to succumb to flattery and luxuries, she finds herself infatuated with men who offer her these things, like Shiner and Maybold. Her relationships with them, however, create unwanted complications in her personal life. Self-knowledge and self-control are gradually acquired by this vain and vacillating, but fundamentally sensible and loving, young lady. As a result, she realizes that Dick Dewy is the best husband for her.

**Climax** - The climax of the plot is reached after Fancy accepts proposals from two men. Though she has been engaged to Dick for some time, the couple has kept it a secret. Therefore, Vicar Maybold also proposes to her. Flattered by his attention, she indicates to him that she will accept. Left with a problem to solve, Fancy comes to her senses and realizes that the down-to-earth and honest Dick is the best choice for a husband. She writes the vicar a note of explanation, turning down his proposal, and begs him to keep the whole affair a secret. When she makes this final decision to marry Dick, the climax is reached.

**Outcome** - The story ends as a comedy. Fancy matures enough to make the right choice for a husband, Dick Dewy. After their wedding, the happy couple drives off into the brilliant moonlight.

## **PLOT (Synopsis)**

On Christmas Eve the members of the Mellstock choir prepare themselves for the annual carolling. Mellowed by generous mugs of cider, the men and boys gather at the home of Reuben Dewy, from where they depart with their fiddles. The first stop is at the school to sing for Fancy Day, the new schoolmistress. At first there is no indication that she has heard them, but at last she appears, framed picture-like at a window. Later the men miss young Dick Dewy. They find him leaning against the school, staring up dreamily at the now darkened window.

At church on the following morning, Fancy Day causes a stir of excitement. She is the primary attraction for three men: Dick Dewy, Farmer Shiner, and the new vicar, Mr. Maybold. She also commits what amounts to blasphemy when she leads the young girls in singing along with the men. As long as anyone can remember, only the males have provided music for the church service. Some of the older and wiser men foresee more trouble from a girl who is so forward.

Mr. Dewy, Dick's father, is a well-respected man, who is called the Tranter by everyone in town. Each year he gives a holiday party, held in the afternoon and evening on Christmas Day. During the dancing, Dick is alternately delighted and depressed by Fancy. He is very happy when he can claim her as his partner, but he feels dejected when she dances with Farmer Shiner, who is a handsome and wealthy man. When Farmer Shiner takes her home, the evening is ruined for the young Dick.

After a few days, using a handkerchief left behind by Fancy as an excuse, Dick finds courage to call on the schoolmistress at the school. Being a very inexperienced lover, he simply returns the handkerchief, stammers a good day, and departs. Through the remaining winter, he pines away in silence for Fancy. By the time that spring arrives, Dick has become a pale and shadowy figure of a man. It is obvious to all, except Fancy and her two other admirers, that Dick is not himself, but no one is certain of the cause since he says nothing of his feelings.

The male church choir is upset, for the members have heard disquieting rumours that they are to be displaced by an organ, played by Fancy Day. They learn from the new vicar, Maybold, that their fears are well founded, for he has brought an organ to the church, preferring that instrument to the voices of a choir. Out of kindness to the choir members, he agrees to wait for a time before dispensing with their singing; he also promises to have their last performance on a special day, rather than on an ordinary Sunday.

Dick is excited to learn that Fancy is to dine at the Dewey home. When he arrives, full of excitement to see her, he is dismayed to find Farmer Shiner already present at the house. During dinner, however, his spirits rise when Fancy allows him to touch her hand. He is even more excited that he is to drive her home and plans to state his feelings for her. During the trip, however, Dick cannot find the words to express what is in his heart.

In the weeks following the dinner, Dick hears many rumours about Fancy's friendliness with the vicar and Farmer Shiner; the news drives him to desperation. One day, he steels himself and writes Fancy a letter, asking bluntly whether he means anything to her. When he receives no reply from her, he resolves that he will have it out with Fancy the next Sunday. Before Sunday arrives, however, he has to go on an errand for the vicar's mother, which will take him to a neighbouring town. As he is about to leave the village, he sees Fancy waiting for the carrier to take her home. Seizing the opportunity, Dick helps her to get into his cart and triumphantly carries her off. On the way home, he finally proposes to her. He is both surprised and overjoyed to hear her acceptance. Fancy and Dick keep their betrothal a secret, for they cannot marry for some time.

Also, Fancy's father has told her that he hopes she will accept Farmer Shiner as her husband, since he is wealthy and available.

There are things about Fancy's character that trouble Dick. Even though they are secretly engaged, she still flirts with other men. She also seems to take undue pleasure in dressing to please others rather than him. He decides he will teach her a lesson by making her worry about his feelings. Whenever he is ready to distance himself as punishment, Fancy apologizes for her vanity, and Dick melts.

On the day he is to meet Fancy's father to ask for her hand in marriage, Dick prepares himself carefully. In spite of his efforts, her father tells him bluntly that he is not good enough for Fancy and that she is too wealthy to wed a plain carrier. Heart-broken, Dick agrees and sadly returns home. Fancy, however, is not so easily defeated. When tears fail to move her father, she resorts to the age-old trick of languishing away for love. She does not eat, at least not so that her father can notice; and she also pines and sighs. The ruse works, and her father reluctantly finds himself begging her to marry Dick. The date is set for the coming midsummer. On the day that Fancy is to begin playing the organ in church, she puts her hair in curls and dresses herself more lavishly than ever before. Dick is sorry to see her dress so beautifully when she knows he will not be present to see her play, for he has to attend the funeral of a friend. On his way home after the funeral, Dick walks through the rain to get one last glimpse of his beloved before he retires. Although she greets him, she does not encourage him to give her a kiss. Later, when she sees the vicar approaching through the rain, she greets him warmly. Knowing nothing of her betrothal to Dick, Maybold has decided to ask for Fancy's hand in marriage. She accepts his proposal, which comes as a surprise, even to her.

The next morning Dick meets Maybold on the road. Still thinking himself betrothed, Dick shyly tells the vicar of his coming marriage to Fancy. Although the vicar is shocked, he says nothing, leaving Dick ignorant of Fancy's faithlessness. Maybold then writes a note to Fancy, telling her that she cannot honourably forsake Dick. Before his note is delivered, he receives a letter from Fancy. It states that she had been momentarily swayed by his proposal and the prospect of a more cultured and elegant life; but she has come to her senses and now begs to withdraw her acceptance of his proposal, because she has loved and still loves another. Fancy and Dick's marriage day arrives. The wedding is an event of great celebration, marred only by the vicar's refusal to perform the ceremony. After the wedding Dick tells his bride that they must never keep a secret from one another. Fancy replies that they will share everything in the future, but she plans never to tell Dick about her past acceptance of the vicar's proposal. As the novel ends, a nightingale laughs in the background.

## **THEMES**

**Major Theme** - The major theme of the novel centres on the strength and goodness of true love. Fancy Day is the central character in the love story. She attracts three admirers: Dewy, Shiner, and Maybold. Even though Shiner and Maybold can offer her more elegance and material goods, Fancy wisely realizes that her heart belongs to Dick Dewy.

**Minor Theme** - A minor theme of the novel is the difficulty of change. When the new vicar comes and brings an organ to replace the male choir, the congregation is horrified. When Fancy leads the young women in singing in the church, the congregation is equally aghast because only male voices have been allowed in the past.

## **MOOD**

The main mood of the book is light, romantic, and cheerful even though Hardy is traditionally viewed as a tragic novelist. Even the death of John Woodward's brother in a pool and Dick's attendance at a funeral of a friend do not destroy the happy mood.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, at Higher Bockhampton near Dorchester. Both his father and grandfather were master stonemasons. Hardy first attended a local school and then a school in Dorchester. From his father, Thomas Hardy, he inherited a love of music, and from his mother, Jemima Hand, a literary bent of mind. Between 1856 and 1861, he was apprenticed to a Dorchester architect, John Hicks. During his

apprenticeship, he studied Latin and Greek and began writing verse. Later he worked in London for the architect Arthur Blowfeld, at which time he read widely and studied painting in the National Gallery. He also practiced architecture independently and was an art critic.

His first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, was written in 1868, but was never published. In 1871, he published his first novel *Desperate Remedies*. In 1874, Hardy married Emma Lavinia Gifford. In the same year, he published *Far from the Madding Crowd*; this novel brought him enough success that he could permanently retire from architecture and devote himself to writing full-time. He wrote the *Return of the Native* between 1876 and 1878. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was published in 1886. The publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1891 created a general furore, and *Jude the Obscure* in 1892 caused a scandal. As a result, Hardy decided to give up writing novels altogether. Instead, he turned his attention to writing lyric poetry. In 1898, he published his "Wessex Poems" and followed this work with "Poems of the Past and Present" in 1902. He also published "Satires of Circumstance" and his longest and greatest poetic work, "The Dynasts," which is an epic drama of the Napoleonic wars in Europe.

By the 1890s Hardy's relationship with his wife had become unhappy and strained. *Jude the Obscure*, in its twin attacks on marriage and the church, was a double blow to Emma. She took it both as a public attack on herself and, as a devout Christian, she felt that her deepest beliefs had been insulted. The relationship between the couple never healed. In November of 1912, Mrs. Hardy died of gallstones, after suffering for a long time from the lingering and painful disease. In 1914, Hardy married Florence Dugdale, a much younger woman who had been working as his secretary and had helped him with research on the "Dynasts."

Thomas Hardy was recognized as an outstanding writer during his lifetime and received several literary honours. He also received an honorary degree from Oxford. The author died on January 11, 1928. Burial in the poet's corner in Westminster Abbey was offered. It was felt, however, that an author whose heart lay in Wessex should not have it buried elsewhere. Therefore, his heart was buried in the grave of his first wife at Stinsford, and his ashes were deposited next to those of Charles Dickens in Westminster Abbey.

## LITERARY INFORMATION

Hardy's description of the countryside in *Under the Greenwood Tree* is based on his knowledge of Dorsetshire, the countryside where he grew up. In fact, Mellstock in the book seems to be his native village, Stinsford, in thin disguise. The Tranter's cottage is a duplicate of the Hardy family's own home: "a long low cottage with a hipped roof of thatch, having dormer windows breaking up into the eaves, a chimney standing in the middle of the ridge and another at each end." Hardy even describes the garden trees, the plants, and the creepers in such detail that he is obviously painting a picture from real life. The keeper's house at Yalbury Wood is similarly authentic and is described in the same detail, hinting that Hardy knew such a house.

The rustics in the novel also seem to be modelled after real people whom he had known in his childhood, and the graves described in the book are still visible today in the Stinsford churchyard. Additionally, the Hardy men, like the Dewys, were all members of the local church choir. Like the Mellstock choir in the novel, the Stinsford choir also came to an end when Hardy was a young child. It is clear that the tranquil Arcadian atmosphere created in the book is a recollection of Hardy's own happy childhood.

# CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

## PART 1: The First Winter

### Chapter 1

#### Summary

The book begins on a cold and starry Christmas Eve in Mellstock. Dick Dewy, an ordinary looking young man, is singing on his way home through the woods. Five other villagers, also travelling towards the Dewy house, join Dick, including Michael Mail (a “bowed and bent man”), Robert Penny (the village shoemaker), Elias Spinks (a man who walked “perpendicularly and dramatically”), Joseph Bowman (an ordinary human being), and Thomas Leaf (a weak looking man whose arms appear to dangle nervelessly in the wind). Dick tells all five of them that his father and grandfather have been eagerly awaiting their arrival. In fact, all of the Mellstock men’s choir will be meeting at Dick’s house, assembling for the annual carol sing. The five villagers tell Dick that they are delighted at the thought of drinking from the new barrel of cider that Dick’s father is going to tap for them.

#### Notes

This first chapter is largely introductory. Hardy begins his description of the lovely Mellstock landscape in the very first paragraph of the novel. He also establishes the harmonious co-existence of the villagers with one another and with nature. In fact, the song that Dick Dewy is singing recalls the kinship between human life and the seasons. The structure of the novel will actually follow the seasons.

The mood is immediately light and cheerful. The night is cold, crisp, and starry. Dick Dewy is obviously in a jovial mood as he sings a happy song. When he encounters other villagers, he is genuinely delighted to see them and tells them that his family eagerly awaits their arrival. The unusual physical characteristics of the rustic villagers are even humorously described by the author, adding to the light mood. There is a sense of festivity about everything, for the choir is gathering to have cider at the Dewy home and then proceeding to have their annual Christmas carol sing. This first chapter clearly establishes that Hardy is writing about a setting that he knows and loves.

### Chapter 2

#### Summary

The Dewy’s house, a low-roofed cottage, has three chimneys and a thatched roof. The walls of the house are covered with creeping plants, and the door appears to be worn out from the coming and going of many people. A little away from the cottage is a building from which comes the sound of woodcutting. The sound of horses can also be heard.

The men’s church choir enters the house, wiping their boots clean on the doorstep. As they enter, they spy Dick’s father, Reuben Dewy. Known to the townsfolk as the Tranter, Reuben, a stout, red-faced man of about forty, is busily engaged in opening a barrel of cider. He does not bother to look up when they enter, but he welcomes the men and tells them that the cider is made from the finest apples.

The main room to the left of the cottage is decorated with a Christmas tree. The Tranter’s wife and four of his children are gathered there; Susan, Jim, Bessy, and Charley are all between the ages of four and sixteen; Dick, the oldest, is twenty years old. Mrs. Dewy invites the choir to sit round the fire. She warmly asks Thomas Leaf to sit beside her and inquires about Mr. Penny’s daughter, who is expecting her fifth baby. As Reuben is about to open the barrel, he remembers the deceased Sam Lawson, who had given him the cider.

When the cider shoots out in a stream, he sends his daughter to get mugs and tells Michael to put his thumb over the hole while he retrieves a cork. The choir sits drinking around the table. Reuben wonders if his father, known as Grandfather William, is cutting wood or playing the violin. He goes to find him and ask him to join the party.

## Notes

In this chapter, traditional rustic hospitality and family life are introduced. The Dewy home is warmly described in careful detail. Even though the Dewys are not wealthy, they are a close family unit. They have put up a Christmas tree in the big room of their picturesque cottage and have gathered around it, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the choir. Mrs. Dewy and four of her children are also eager for the return of Dick, the oldest son. As they wait, Reuben Dewy, Dick's father, is attempting to open a barrel of cider, which he plans to share with the men from the church choir.

When the choir members enter, they are warmly welcomed with familiarity, even though Reuben never looks up from the task at hand. He feels totally comfortable with these rustics and feels no need to be formal. The group gathers around the table to enjoy the cider and good-humoured conversation about their lives, past and present; it is obvious that they like and enjoy one another. When Reuben realizes that his own father, Grandfather William, has not yet joined them, he calls him to the party. In totality, the chapter is a warm picture of close community filled with a festive mood.

## Chapter 3

### Summary

Even though Grandfather William is seventy, he is still very active although sometimes weak-minded. His bright face would remind a gardener of the "sunny side of a ripe ribstone – pippin." William, a religious man, is also very good-hearted. When he joins the party, he wishes everyone a merry Christmas and throws an armful of logs on the fire. Before coming in, William has invited Grandfather James, Mrs. Dewy's father, to join them. He is a miserly stone mason who lives alone in his cottage.

Grandfather William and the choir talk about which carols they will sing, for they need to practice in order to do well. Robert Penny, the local shoemaker, interrupts to exclaim that he has forgotten to deliver a pair of boots to the schoolhouse; he curses his weak-mindedness in forgetting important matters. Seeing that the mention of the boots has generated greater interest than expected, Penny explains that he has made boots for Geoffrey Day, Geoffrey's father, and Geoffrey's sister, Fancy Day. The boots that he has forgotten to deliver are the ones for Miss Day, who wanted to wear them to church the next morning. Talk turns to the new schoolmistress, whom they call "a figure of fun" and "just husband-high."

Penny then tells the story of John Woodward's brother. When he drowned, no one could identify the body; but Penny was able to identify his boots. Spinks, considered the town scholar and a good teacher, says that he can identify the ways of a man's heart from his feet. Reuben expresses surprise at the fact that a person's character could be read from his feet. Grandfather William again turns the talk to the carol sing. He wonders whether they should sing for the new schoolmistress. Dick Dewy's interest is aroused because he has heard that Fancy Day is young and beautiful.

## Notes

In this chapter the Mellstock rustics are brought to life through their conversation and the stories that they tell. They perform an almost choric function as they give information on various characters and events. Penny's discussion on boot making and his digression on John Woodward's brother are very interesting and earthy,

lending realism to the dialogue. The discussion of Fancy Day is humorous, but significant, since she will become the protagonist of the story and the object of Dick's affection.

Much time is spent in the description of Grandfather William, Reuben's father. He is a kind-hearted man of seventy; although he is still very active, he is often forgetful. His cheerfulness is a sharp contrast to Mrs. Dewy's father, Grandfather James, who is a miserly loner.

## Chapter 4

### Summary

Amidst drinking cider, talking, and arranging the music books, the men finally decide upon the songs for the carol sing. Then at about ten o'clock, the younger boys in the choir arrive at Tranter Dewy's house and busy themselves with putting candles inside the lanterns. Finally, everyone dresses himself for the outing. The older men dress in thick coats with coloured handkerchiefs covering their necks. The younger men and boys dress in snow-white smocks with embroidery on the shoulders and chest; they also wrap their ankle in hay to prevent any snowflakes from getting into their boots. When they depart, there are eleven singers – four men and seven boys. There are also three musicians: Dick, Reuben, and Michael Mail. Grandfather William serves as the choir director.

Mellstock parish is a large area. Lower Mellstock, the main village, is half a mile away and contains the church, the vicarage, and a few other houses; the Dewys live in Upper Mellstock, located to the northeast. It will take the choir a long while to sing for everyone in Mellstock, even if they offer only one carol at each stop. Just before the clock strikes twelve, they light their lanterns and start off. William suggests that Farmer Ledlow's house be the first of their many stops. By two o'clock, the choir has sung to most of the houses in the Upper Village; they then head to the main village through the woods.

While walking towards town, Michael Mail remarks that the Mellstock choir is perhaps the last carol sing in the country, for nobody seems to care about singing any more. Music from new instruments, like the barrelorgan and the clarinet, has become popular and has replaced both choral and stringed music. The choir members call the modernists "miserable dumbledores". When the choir finally reaches the school, William announces that they will sing carol number seventy-eight, an old traditional tune passed down from father to son through several generations. When they finish the song, they wait for the schoolmistress to acknowledge them. When she does not appear, they also sing the fifty-ninth carol. Even after this song, no one stirs in the schoolhouse. William says that Miss Day must not be inside, but Reuben and Penny think that she is sneering at their music. William insists that they sing one more carol and then in a clear, loud voice, he says Merry Christmas.

### Notes

This chapter captures the exacting preparations for the carol sing. The young boys arrive at ten o'clock to ready the lanterns and the music, and everyone dresses carefully in their proper attire. It is obvious that the male choir is very proud of this annual event. They brag that they are probably the last group in the country to go out and serenade the community with carols on Christmas Eve.

The people in Mellstock are real traditionalists, who do not change easily. The gathering at the Dewys on Christmas Even has been a long-standing tradition, just like the carol sing. Additionally, the choir has refused to expand itself to include the females of the village. Finally, many of the songs that are sung have been passed down for years, from father to son for generation after generation. The choir members also resent that new instruments, like the organ and clarinet, have been introduced and are replacing traditional choral and stringed music. The men of Mellstock are committed to fighting modernity in their own village.

It is obvious that the men in this choir are very proud of their music. When they sing at the schoolhouse, they are miffed that Miss Day does not come out to acknowledge them. The kind-hearted William states that she is

probably not at home, but Reuben and Penny are certain that this “modern” woman is inside and sneering at them. William decides that they will sing a second, and then a third, song to attract the schoolmistress’ attention. He even calls out in a loud voice, “Merry Christmas.”

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary**

After the third song, a light appears in one of the windows of the upper floor. Then the blind is lifted from the window, and a lovely young woman appears. She thanks the singers and then disappears. All of the men, except Dick, agree that Fancy Day has seemed like a fleeting vision; Dick, however, is totally enthralled with her beauty.

The choir moves to Farmer Shiner’s house, where they sing “Behold the Morning Star.” During the second verse, a loud voice shouts and asks them to stop the music. The window is then slammed shut. In spite of their rude treatment, William orders the singers to complete the carol and then sing number nineteen as well. He will not be insulted by anyone. Farmer Shiner again comes to the window, puts on the light, and gestures rudely at the choir, shouting all the while. His shouts are drowned in the music, for William has told the choir and musicians to be loud. When the choir finally departs, everyone talks about Shiner’s vulgar display of temper and attributes it to drunkenness.

The choir members cross Mellstock Bridge and go towards the church and vicarage. Voss is waiting for them in the churchyard with a hearty meal. They go inside to eat. When they emerge from the church, William notices that Dick is missing from the group. While the members of the choir are angry that he has left them, his father and grandfather are worried about his safety and convince the others to search for him. When they approach the schoolhouse, they see a light in the slightly open bedroom window. Then they notice Dick leaning against a beech tree, with his eyes fixed on the window. He is unable to explain why he stayed back from the group, but he found he could not leave the schoolhouse. Obviously, he has fallen in love with Fancy.

The choir goes to the vicarage and sings. Mr. Maybold, the new vicar, emerges and thanks them kindly for their carols. They remark that he seems to be a clever young chap. Reuben says that the schoolmistress will twist the vicar round her finger and make him dance to her tune in no time at all.

### **Notes**

Hardy’s ability to create a clear image is again seen in this chapter. The description of Fancy Day, as she is framed in the window, is like a word painting, where she emerges as a living, but unearthly and superior, work of art. It is significant that the first view of Fancy is so striking and lovely, for she is to become the protagonist of the novel and the centre of attention for the rest of the book. The visual affect that Hardy creates with Fancy is similar to that in chapter I, where he describes the shadows of the Mellstock villagers against the night sky, calling them some kind of processional design on Greek or Etruscan pottery. It also recalls the description of Dick Dewy’s shadow, “like the portrait of a gentleman in black cardboard.”

The responses that Shiner, Maybold, and Fancy have to the carols are very telling about their basic characters. Shiner shouts at the singers to quit their noise and slams the window in their faces. He is obviously a gruff, vulgar sort who does not enjoy the comradeship of the community. In contrast, Maybold, the vicar, is delighted with the music and filled with praises for the choir. Although he is new to the community, he will make a real effort to quickly fit in, even though it will later become apparent that he is a bit hypocritical. Reuben also suggests that he will probably fall in love with the schoolmistress, a clear foreshadowing of what will happen later in the plot.

Fancy's reaction to the carols falls in between that of the two men, who are to become her suitors. At first she is hesitant to respond to the choir. Through the first two carols, she never stirs. Reuben and Penny are sure that she is intentionally snubbing them and their traditional songs. To prove them wrong, the determined William insists on singing a third carol, just as he had insisted on singing at second one at the home of Farmer Shiner. At its completion, Fancy demurely comes to the window and offers a quiet, kind word of thanks. Before she quickly disappears, everyone is struck by her loveliness. Fancy seems to be fully aware of the kind of affect she can have on men. She will later use this in her flirtations with Dick, Shiner, and Maybold. Dick, a young bachelor of twenty, is particularly enthralled by Fancy's beauty. When the other choir members depart from the schoolhouse, he finds that he cannot leave. Instead, he stands by a beech tree staring at Fancy's window, hoping to get another glance at her. He has fallen immediately and overwhelmingly in love.

## Chapter 6

### Summary

After the carolling, the choir members go to their separate homes to sleep for awhile, but Dick's slumber is disturbed. He can only think about Fancy. When he awakes in the morning, he immediately wonders whether Fancy will come to church. He gets ready with speed and eagerness, hoping to soon get a glimpse of the schoolmistress.

Since the choir will be performing, the Dewys tune their instruments at home to avoid the confusion and noise in the church. When they arrive in the gallery, the rest of the choir has assembled, and the parishioners are filling the nave. With excitement, Dick notices Fancy entering the church and taking her place with the schoolgirls, as directed by Farmer Shiner. Dick's senses suddenly become alert because of her presence. Maybold has the same reaction to Fancy.

The choir performs badly, probably due to the fact that they are exhausted from the carol sing. The Vicar is angry about the performance. Fancy tries to help out the choir, telling the schoolgirls to join in the singing with loud, clear voices. The choir is furious that the girls have dared to join in, for only males have been allowed to sing in the long history of the church. The gallery is suddenly filled with indignant whispering. Mr. Spinks wants to march out of the church in protest. William, however, calms the choir and calls their attention to the sermon. Dick says nothing about the whole affair, since Fancy is blamed as the culprit. He just hopes that she will still come to the Christmas party to be held at his house later in the evening.

### Notes

As the Dewys prepare for church on Christmas morning, Hardy gives another wonderful, detailed, and amusing description of rustic domestic life. As Dick rushes through his preparations, hoping to soon see Fancy, his father dawdles over his and insists that their instruments be tuned at home rather than at the church. When they finally arrive, Dick looks for Fancy in the nave and soon sees her entering. He feels like all of his senses become more alert because of her presence. Maybold, however, has the same reaction to her, indicating he will also become her suitor.

During the chapter, Fancy reveals that she is not ruled by tradition. When the choir falters in their singing, she encourages the schoolgirls to join in and help them out. The choir is horrified by their intrusion, for never have females been allowed to sing in the choir; they blame the indiscretion on Fancy, calling her a culprit. Mr. Spinks is so upset over the matter that he wants to walk out of the church in protest. Dick is unaffected by Fancy's boldness. All he can think about is her coming to the Christmas party at his house; he can hardly wait until evening.

The theme of the old vs. the new begins to clearly develop in this chapter. The choir, with their many traditions, represents the old style of life. Fancy, on the other hand, becomes a representative of modernity.

Later she will actually replace the choir with her organ playing, indicating that the old must give way to the new.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Summary**

The Dewys prepare for the evening's party by tidying up their house during the afternoon. Mrs. Dewy even trims Reuben's hair and repairs his frayed collar. She complains, though without bitterness, about marrying into a family below her station in life. By ten o'clock, the party is in full swing. As Dick tunes the instruments, Reuben knows that his son wants the dancing to begin. The religious William, however, orders that the dancing can only begin at midnight, after Christmas day is over. At the stroke of midnight, Dick appears with his violin to start the dancing. Even Grandfather William joins in the merriment with gay abandon. Fancy, looking very beautiful, accepts a dance with Dick.

Though Dick tries his best to be the good host, he cannot help feeling jealous when Fancy dances with Shiner. When their dancing continues, Dick complains to the farmer that he has kept Fancy longer than the rules of the dance. Despite his efforts to be on his best behaviour, Dick's jealousy stirs up an argument. Reuben intervenes and puts an end to it by complaining loudly about the heat.

### **Notes**

The detailed description of the dance reveals Hardy's first-hand knowledge of such gatherings. He carefully portrays how the rustics enjoy themselves immensely. Even though they have to wait until midnight to begin the dancing, due to William's religious beliefs, when the merriment starts, everyone joins in. Dick is delighted to dance with Fancy and grows jealousy when Farmer Shiner tries to monopolize her time. Shiner's behaviour at the party is as bad as it was when he shouted at the choir singers on Christmas Eve. It is no wonder that Dick gets into an argument with him, but Reuben rushes in before things get out of hand. Dick's temporary loss of Fancy to the farmer during the party foreshadows later events in the novel.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Summary**

As the party continues, Dick dances blissfully with Fancy, even kissing her lightly underneath the mistletoe. When the dance is over, supper is prepared. During the meal, Dick is delighted to be sitting close to Fancy, but he resents that Shiner converses with her. When Fancy prepares to depart, Dick notices that she seems somewhat distant and aloof. He then notices that she has accepted Shiner's offer to take her home. After everyone has departed, Dick stands alone and remembers with relish the time he spent with Fancy at the party. In contrast to his own romantic feelings for Fancy, Dick notices how unromantic his parents feel towards each other. He wonders why marriage seems to drive away romance.

### **Notes**

Hardy's description of the pulsating music and the rhythm of the dance is masterfully written. In contrast, he delicately portrays Dick's relationship with Fancy. It is obvious in this chapter that he has fallen deeper in love and grown jealous of any other attention paid to her, especially by Farmer Shiner. At the end of the chapter, after everyone has left the party, Dick reflects on the time he has spent with Fancy. He also listens as the elder Dewys complain of their fatigue and need to go to bed; Dick realizes that all romance has gone out of their relationship and wonders why marriage seems to drive it away.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Summary**

When Fancy returns to Mellstock after the Christmas holidays, Dick spends much of his time passing in front of the schoolhouse. He, however, is unable to even catch a glimpse of her. He finally decides he will call on her to return the handkerchief she left at the Christmas party at the Dewys. In the end, he cannot bring himself to knock at the school, for he is not sure how Fancy feels about him and does not want to make a fool of himself.

One day Dick sees her in the garden and shouts to her. When Fancy comes to the gate, he gives her the handkerchief and quickly leaves. Later Dick regrets the fact that he did not stay at talk to her.

### **Notes**

Winter and the first part of the story come to an end with this chapter. All the main characters have been introduced and developed, except for Mr. Geoffrey Day. Dick's love of Fancy is also firmly established. Additionally, Hardy has carefully painted a word picture of the rustic setting, including the quiet country life of Mellstock and the humorous characters that inhabit it.

This last chapter of Part 1 further develops Dick as a shy young man who is unsure of himself. He walks back and forth in front of the school, hoping to encounter Fancy Day. Never seeing her, he decides he will call on her to return her handkerchief left at the Christmas party, but he cannot work up enough courage to knock on the schoolhouse. One day he finally sees her in the garden and calls to her. When she comes to the gate, he is not brave enough to enter into a conversation; instead, he gives her the handkerchief and quickly leaves.

## **PART 2: Spring**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Summary**

With the coming of the nice spring weather, Dick walks past the schoolhouse even more frequently. One day he notices Fancy looking at him from an open window. She greets him in a friendly manner, which encourages him greatly. Soon the chance meetings between them become more frequent, and Fancy always seems pleased to see Dick. He cannot decide whether she merely feels pleased to receive so much attention from Dick or whether she cares for him.

#### **Notes**

In this short chapter, Dick is given some encouragement by Fancy. When she finally spies him walking in front of the school, she greets him in a friendly manner, which encourages Dick greatly. Soon there seem to be many chance encounters in which Fancy always seems pleased to see him. Although Dick is certain of how he feels for her, he is very unsure of her feeling for him.

### **Chapter 2**

#### **Summary**

One fine spring evening, the chief members of the Mellstock church choir gather outside Robert Penny's workshop in the lower village to discuss the new vicar and their relationship with him. They are concerned because Mr. Maybold is clearly of the new school of thought; they also dislike his new ways, for they do not like change. They are particularly upset about his desire to disband the church choir and replace it with organ

music. Surprisingly, Grandfather William, who is very firm about his Christian principles, insists that Maybold is a well meaning and good man. Reuben supports his father's opinion.

## Notes

The key members of the Mellstock choir have gathered to voice their concerns about Maybold, who has quickly brought many changes. They are particularly concerned that the new vicar wants to replace the music of the choir with organ music, played by Fancy Day. They are also curious about the vicar's interest in Fancy. Many of their comments, recorded in fine country dialogue, are quite humorous. Ironically, the most respected and senior member of the choir, William Dewey, speaks out in support of Maybold. As he speaks, Hardy describes him as standing nobly in the light of the setting sun, "which gave him a Titanic shadow at least thirty feet in length." William, the ideal symbol of rustic village life and harmonious co-existence, is also likened to the Greenwood tree

## Chapter 3

### Summary

The choir members notice Dick, who is approaching them. Reuben tells the others that he suspects his son is in love with Fancy, for his behaviour has been like that of a mooning lover. He blames the situation on his wife, for she is the one who insisted on inviting Fancy Day to the Christmas party.

When Dick joins them, Mr. Spinks changes the subject to ask how Maybold knew that Fancy could play the organ. Dick, sensing the choir's nervousness about the organ, assures them that Fancy may not play the organ, for she values her friendship with the choir and does not want to upset them. Reuben suggests that the choir should meet with the vicar to discuss the issue, even though they realize that Maybold has a right to handle the church affairs in his own way. They do decide, however, to ask permission to continue their choral music until next Christmas even if he decides to replace them eventually. Reuben invites the choir party to his house to eat some bacon and drink some cider, so that they can build up courage to face the vicar.

## Notes

In this chapter, the rustics of the Mellstock choir show that they are filled with good sense and kindness as they discuss three matters: Dick's love affair, the way to compromise with the vicar, and their attitude about Thomas Leaf. When Reuben says that he fears Dick is in love with Fancy, the other rustics try to comfort him. When they talk about the changes that Maybold has made, it is clear that the choir members do not like the new things, but accept that the vicar has the right to run the church as he chooses. Even though they are upset about the matter of disbanding the choir in favour of organ music, they are too kind hearted by nature to show any bitterness. Instead, they suggest the compromise of allowing the choir to sing until next Christmas. When the discussion turns to Thomas Leaf and his family, plagued by infant mortality and mental retardation, there is a tinge of sadness in their voices. Although they laugh at Leaf's foolishness, they also show a kind understanding for his problems.

Most of the conversation between the choir members is riddled with humour and realistic country dialect, creating true local colour. As a group, it is obvious that they share a deep sense of comradeship, enjoying one another's company. In fact, at the end of the chapter, the genial Reuben asks them all to come to his house for bacon and cider. It will also give them a chance to gather their courage to approach the vicar.

## Chapter 4

### Summary

At six o'clock the next evening, the key members of the Mellstock choir depart together for the vicar's house. Their movement, almost like a brisk march, is an indication of their initial determination; however, by the time they reach the hill behind the vicarage, they have lost some of their courage, and their marching has turned into a mere tramping of feet. Before reaching the vicarage, Reuben suggests that only two or three men actually go inside to talk to the vicar. William, Thomas Leaf, and Reuben are selected.

When the choir knocks upon the door, a maidservant answers and goes to tell the vicar of their presence. She describes the visitors as a very grim-looking, determined lot, especially Reuben Dewy. Although Maybold is astonished to learn that the choir is at his door, he tells the maid to show them in. All but three of the choir members remain outside in the passage. Reuben leads the other two chosen men into the house, where everything looks familiar to him, for he has often delivered luggage or firewood here.

After the vicar greets the three men, the conversation begins with a discussion of Thomas Leaf's misfortunes, which have caused him to grow even thinner. At the end of the conversation, Mr. Maybold compassionately gives Leaf half a crown and promises to visit his mother. Reuben then tells the vicar, in a very matter of fact tone, that the choir would like to sing until Christmas, even if they are to be later disbanded. Maybold listens politely and then tries to assure them that he does not find any fault with the choir. Even though he admittedly prefers organ music over choral music, the vicar explains that the churchwarden, Farmer Shiner, is really the one anxious for the change. Reuben tells the vicar that Shiner has no ear for music and has a strong dislike for the choir members. Maybold, however, is not swayed and announces that the choir can sing until Michaelmas day, for Christmas would be too late, since the organ is already present and waiting to be played.

As Reuben, with emotion, talks about the love that he and Grandfather William have for music, he keeps moving closer and closer to Maybold. The latter, in turn, keeps moving backwards, away from Reuben, and accidentally drops his pen. Both the vicar and Reuben reach for the pen. When Maybold bumps his face, an old cut on his chin begins to bleed again. When everyone shows concern, the vicar grows embarrassed and is eager for the meeting to end.

### Notes

More is learned about Maybold in this chapter. He proves himself to be genial and kind, but also truthful and firm. He listens politely to the choir members' arguments and suggestions; but he is not greatly swayed by them. Admitting that he prefers organ music and insisting that the new instrument be played soon, he tells the choir that they can only perform through Michaelmas Day, not Christmas. He does, however, handle the situation in a tactful way, being careful not to upset the choir members. He also reveals that Farmer Shiner, in his position of churchwarden, has insisted upon the change to organ music.

There is situational humour in the scene when Reuben keeps moving closer and closer to the vicar, while Maybold moves further and further backwards. When the vicar accidentally drops his pen, both he and Dewey reach down to retrieve it. During the whole process, Reuben never stops his conversation, but talks to Maybold under the table.

The entire chapter is a warm picture of compromise and community. Even though the choir members do not get what they really want, they hold no bitterness towards the vicar. This is clearly seen when they show their concern about his bleeding chin. When the choir finally departs, there is a sense of reconciliation and fellowship amongst everyone, including the vicar.

## Chapter 5

### Summary

As the choir members head home, Reuben relates what transpired at Mr. Maybold's. He adds that the vicar is such a nice man that it is impossible to quarrel with him. They also discuss how Farmer Shiner and Fancy Day fit into the organ situation and believe that he is trying to court her, as well as Maybold. They decide that Fancy must be a cleverer person than her secretive and well-to-do father, Geoffrey Day.

### Notes

As the choir departs the vicarage, they discuss the fact that they will no longer be allowed to sing in church; although they do not like the change, it is obvious that they are reconciled to it. Their talk then turns to gossip about Shiner, Maybold, Fancy, and her father, Geoffrey. The conversation of the rustics is once again filled with wit and humour. They also underline the growing conflict in the story, for Dick, Maybold, and Shiner are all interested in winning the hand of Fancy.

## Chapter 6

### Summary

After the Easter holidays, Dick goes to Yalbury Wood, to the home of Geoffrey Day, in order to transport Fancy and some of her furniture back to Mellstock. Since Geoffrey is the head gamekeeper, timber steward, and general supervisor for the Earl of Wesson, he makes a good living and has a nice house with fine furnishings. Most of the furniture in the house has a duplicate; the second set is intended for Fancy when she marries and has a home of her own.

When Dick arrives, Fancy is preparing dinner. Her father asks him to eat with them. When Mrs. Day, Fancy's stepmother, does not come to the table, Geoffrey explains that his wife is somewhat different. Fancy is obviously uncomfortable with her father's chatter about Mrs. Day; therefore, he changes the subject to Farmer Shiner and announces that the man has a real interest in Fancy. This news distresses Dick, but Fancy says she has no interest in Shiner.

Mrs. Day enters the room and ignores Dick and the other guest, Enoch, who is Geoffrey's trapper. She complains that the tablecloth and cutlery being used appear so poor that they belong in the workhouse. She then proceeds to change the linen and crockery on the table. Though embarrassed by her, Fancy tries to help Mrs. Day get settled at the table.

### Notes

In this chapter, Hardy gives a detailed description of the Day family and home. Since both her father and stepmother are very different, Fancy is somewhat embarrassed by their behaviour. In spite of their difference, the conversation and comments of Mr. and Mrs. Day are still filled with wit and humour, in typical Hardy fashion.

The Days are the first people in the novel to be concerned about material goods and social status. Their home, unlike the rustic cabins, is filled with two sets of fine furniture, one for the Days and one for Fancy. Mrs. Day is so concerned about the appearance of the tablecloth and place settings that she immediately changes them, not wanting anyone to think they are poor. Mr. Day is interested in his daughter taking an interest in Farmer Shiner, because he is wealthy; fortunately for Dick, Fancy states that she has no interest in Shiner. But growing up in this environment, it is not surprising that Fancy has become somewhat vain herself.

## Chapter 7

### Summary

On the way to Mellstock, Dick is subdued, silent, and almost gloomy, for he is thinking about Geoffrey Day's comments on Shiner. Fancy is also mostly silent, offering only a few monosyllables. When they finally reach the schoolhouse, Dick carries in the furniture and offers to help her in arranging the room since the maid has already left. Fancy complains that nobody, even the vicar, is concerned whether she has safely returned. Once inside the house, the moods of both Dick and Fancy seem to improve. He lights the fire, and Fancy begins to prepare tea. When the vicar suddenly arrives, Fancy seems uninterested in Dick and hurries him out of the house without giving him tea. As Dick departs from the schoolhouse, he is in a real huff and a fit of jealousy.

### Notes

This chapter is based upon an irony. All the way back to Mellstock Dick worries about Shiner and Mr. Day's support of him as a future husband for Fancy. He should really be worrying about Vicar Maybold, for he is the man for whom Fancy seems to have a genuine interest. Back in Mellstock, she complains that the vicar does not seem interested in her return. When he does come calling, Fancy ignores Dick and tries to hurry him out of the house, obviously preferring Maybold. It is not surprising that Dick is upset when he leaves the schoolhouse, for he understands he has a new rival for Fancy's hand.

## Chapter 8

### Summary

As Dick drives homeward, he frets about Fancy's fickle behaviour towards him. Although she had been pleasant and relaxed with him as they arranged her furniture, she had very nearly bullied him out of the house when Maybold arrived. He wonders if she is maybe a flirtatious coquette, for she had also bragged about Shiner's interest in her, even though she claimed to have no interest in him.

Passing his father on the road, Dick stops to chat. Reuben immediately notices that his son seems miserable and advises him not to be too much in love with Fancy. For the first time Dick admits to his father that he cares for the girl and states that if he were rich enough, he would ask her to marry him. Reuben again advises him to be cautious. He also tells him about Shiner's interest in Fancy, saying he had promoted her as the organist in order to win her hand. Finally, he reminds his son that Fancy's social status is much above their own and that she will probably never consider marrying beneath her.

Reuben then talks about his own courtship of his wife. He admits that Dick's mother was socially superior to him and winning her hand was not easy. Dick tells his father that he has another problem with Fancy, for she seems to have an interest in the vicar. Again Reuben warns Dick to be careful with his feelings. Dick does not heed the warning, for when he goes home, he writes a grand and serious love letter to Fancy; however, he tears it up without sending it. He then writes another letter to her in a lighter tone in which he confesses his feelings and asks about hers. He gives the second letter to a little boy to deliver to Fancy.

Dick waits for Fancy's answer to his letter, but it does not come. He decides he will seek her out on Sunday and ask for answers, hoping to clear things up. When Reuben asks him on Friday to take some swarms of bees to Mrs. Maybold in Budmouth, he is grateful to have something to do that will keep his mind off of Fancy and Sunday.

## Notes

In this chapter, Hardy presents Reuben, a caring father, giving wise and cautious advice to his son. Upon seeing the miserable countenance of Dick, he immediately senses that his son is having love problems. Being older and wiser, Reuben has also realized that Fancy is a vain young lady from a wealthy family; he feels that she will choose a socially superior husband in order to improve her status in life. As a result, he warns Dick not to be hopeful about winning her hand. As a further discouragement to his son, he even discloses that the wealthy Shiner has a real interest in Fancy. The realistic father ends the conversation by praising Dick. He reminds his son that he has had a very good education and that he can be successful in life; therefore, if he tries hard and feels strong about it, perhaps he can win Fancy's hand. Reuben reminds Dick that his wife, Dick's mother, had been socially superior to him, and still he had won her hand. In other words, this is a situation of "like father, like son."

## PART 3: Summer

### Chapter 1

#### Summary

As Dick prepares to leave Budmouth for Mellstock, he sees Fancy and offers her a ride home, which she accepts. When Dick tells her that he is pleased to have her company, Fancy rudely snubs him. Dick is quiet and moody for awhile; he then succeeds in striking up a conversation with Fancy. He even gets her to admit that she does love him a little. They also decide to be less formal and call each other by their first names.

#### Notes

It is significant that this chapter is in the section of the book called summer, the season of growth. Throughout spring, Dick's love for Fancy was budding; now it begins to truly grow, for on the way from Budmouth to Mellstock, Fancy admits to him that she does love him a little, an admission that delights Dick. The delicate and emotional scene between Fancy and Dick is intentionally contrasted with the comic sight of the fat farmer's wife in her ballooning dress.

### Chapter 2

#### Summary

On the way to Mellstock, Farmer Shiner's cart overtakes Dick's cart. When Shiner and his friend gaze admiringly at Fancy, she obviously enjoys their admiration. She tells Dick that she likes to attract attention, even though she has no interest in Shiner.

Dick and Fancy stop at an inn to have tea. Dick seizes the opportunity to try and get Fancy's consent to marry him. At the inn, he pretends to the landlord that the two of them were engaged a long time ago, thereby dropping the hint to Fancy.

#### Notes

In this chapter, Dick becomes more courageous in his pursuit of Fancy. Luck also helps him in advancing his romance. Given the opportunity to drive her home from Budmouth to Mellstock, he takes advantage of the situation. When they stop for tea, Dick hints at his interest in having Fancy for his wife by telling the innkeeper that they have been engaged for a long while. His bravado is quite humorous.

The vain side of Fancy is again seen in the chapter. After Farmer Shiner and his friend stare at her in admiration, she admits to Dick that she likes receiving attention from men; she assures him, however, that she has no romantic interest in the farmer. She likes him even less when Dick explains that Shiner has plotted for her to become the organist, hoping to win her hand.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Summary**

When this chapter begins, three summer months have passed, and the course of true love has gone smoothly for Dick. Fancy shows her obvious interest in him when she questions Susan, Dick's sister, about his behaviour at a gypsy party. When Susan assures her that Dick really has no interest in the wealthy farmer's daughter with whom he had danced at the party, Fancy grows jealous. She decides she must get even with Dick. When Dick arrives, she tells him that Shiner has proposed to her and that her father has given the farmer permission to court her; the news upsets Dick. He later realizes that she is trying to make him jealous, so he walks away in a huff. Fancy runs after him, apologizes, and tells him that she loves only him.

#### **Notes**

The course of true love, which has run smoothly through most of the summer, gets bogged down in jealousy in this chapter. First, Fancy grows jealous when she learns that Dick has danced with another woman at the gypsy party, even though Susan tries to assure her that her brother has no interest in the girl. In jealousy and immaturity, Fancy wants to strike back, so she tells Dick that Shiner wants to marry her and has gained permission to court her from her father. When Dick leaves in a huff, Fancy runs to him, apologizes, and pledges her love for him alone. It is obvious that the young couple truly loves one another; they simply need to replace their jealousies with trust in each other.

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Summary**

Dick and Fancy have kept their romance a secret, for they know that the wealthy Geoffrey will disapprove because of Dick's social status; but when Dick learns that Shiner has approached Geoffrey about Fancy, he knows that it is time to go and see her father and ask him for Fancy's hand in marriage. The two of them decide they will talk to Mr. Day together, after Fancy returns home for honey-taking. Fancy cannot decide what to wear for the occasion. Dick suggests a homely bonnet, but she decides on a sporty hat. Dick condemns it as being "coquettish and flirty."

#### **Notes**

The plot advances with the lovers' decision to talk to Geoffrey Day about their getting married. Neither looks forward to the occasion, for they realize that Fancy's father will think that Dick is beneath her social standing. They also know that he wants his daughter to marry the wealthy Shiner.

Although their love has grown much stronger, it is obvious that Dick and Fancy still have many basic differences, for he is much more conservative than she. Dick wants her to wear a homely bonnet to the honey-taking, but the more modern and bold Fancy decides on a much more sporty and attractive hat. Dick complains that she is a flirt. In spite of their differences, they seem to be committed to one another.

## **PART 4: Autumn**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Summary**

On Friday afternoon, a day before their planned visit to Mr. Day, a happy Dick pays Fancy a surprise visit. He urges her to come “nutting” with him, but she says she cannot go anywhere for awhile, for she is busy altering a blue dress that she wants to wear to Longpuddle Church on Sunday. Dick patiently waits for her to finish the job, but at five o’clock she is still sewing. Dick’s patience has grown thin, and he complains to Fancy, saying the dress is not important, for he would not even be around on Sunday to see her in it. With vanity, Fancy replies that she wants to look nice for the young men of Longpuddle, even if Dick is not around. Dick tells her to finish up and join him in a quarter of an hour. As he waits for her down the road, he grows angry over her vanity and decides to go “nutting” on his own. As he hurriedly picks up nuts, he finds himself growing angrier and angrier with Fancy. He even thinks about giving her up, saying she is not worthy of him. On his way home, he encounters Fancy, who is repentant and tearful. She tells him that her blue dress is not nearly as important as Dick’s love. Dick’s finds his heart melting, and he forgives Fancy and walks her home, forgetting all about the bag of nuts he has gathered.

#### **Notes**

The first of the autumn troubles for Fancy and Dick is described in this chapter. As Fancy ignores Dick to alter a blue dress, he grows impatient. When he complains that he will not even see her in the dress on Sunday, she says that what is important is that she looks good for the men of Longpuddle. Dick, furious of her rudeness and vanity, leaves the house with instructions for her to soon meet him to go and gather nuts. As he waits for her, he grows more and more angry. He finally decides to go nutting for himself; the more he thinks about Fancy, the faster he works. In the end, he thinks that she is not worthy of his love and decides to give her up. On the way back home, a tearful and repentant Fancy wins Dick’s heart anew. The first real quarrel is behind the lovers.

### **Chapter 2**

#### **Summary**

On Saturday evening Dick walks over to Geoffrey Day’s house. He sees Mr. and Mrs. Day, Fancy, Enoch, and Farmer Shiner emerging from the house to gather honey. He stays in the shadows, quietly watching the proceedings. He is delighted to see that Fancy resists the attentions of Farmer. He is also amused to see Shiner beat a hasty retreat when the bees sting Geoffrey.

Geoffrey departs to tend his bee stings, and Fancy takes care of the honeycomb, with Shiner looking on. When Dick emerges from the shadows and announces his presence, Fancy offers him some honeycomb. As she eats a piece herself, she is stung on the lip by a bee. Both Shiner and Dick jump to her aid, and she sends them inside the house to get some medicine. In the rivalry to take the antidote to Fancy, Mrs. Day allows Shiner to win, upsetting Dick.

When Geoffrey Day returns, Dick boldly asks to speak to him. They retreat to the garden, where Dick asks for Fancy’s hand. Geoffrey says that he cannot allow Fancy to marry Dick, for she holds a superior social position. He reminds Dick that her mother is from a landed family. In essence, he says that Fancy is too good for him. Dick mournfully agrees.

## Notes

Dick heads to the Day home to ask Geoffrey for Fancy's hand in marriage. He is taken aback when he sees the family and Shiner emerging from the house to gather honey. He decides to stay in the shadows and watch what goes on.

The gathering of honey, a typical rural activity in the nineteenth century, is vividly described by Hardy. In the rural economy of the time, home-grown honey was important because sugar was often a luxury. Although the ancient art of bee-keeping underwent a revolutionary change in the middle of the nineteenth century, Geoffrey Day preferred the old fashioned way, where honey could only be taken from the bottom of the hive.

During the gathering of honey, Dick is pleased to see that Fancy resists the advances of Shiner. In fact, she displays marvellous quick-wittedness in her exchange with the farmer. It seems that her flirtatious ways have subsided and her love for Dick is true and sincere. Dick is also amused to see a fearful Shiner run from the bees.

When Dick makes his presence known, Fancy turns her attention to him and offers him some honeycomb. She also eats some herself and is stung by a bee. Both Shiner and Dick rush to her aid, but it is Shiner who gets and brings the medicine for the bee sting to Fancy. Dick is miffed that Shiner has beaten him. He decides he will talk to Geoffrey Day as soon as he returns from tending his bee stings. As he waits, his mood worsens as he hears the cry of a small bird being killed in the woods by an owl.

Upon Geoffrey's return and Dick's request, the two men retire to the garden. Dick wastes no time in asking for Fancy's hand in marriage. Geoffrey is very blunt in replying that Dick's social status is simply not good enough for Fancy. Although Dick is crushed, he agrees with Day that he is not worthy of Fancy.

## Chapter 3

### Summary

A month later Fancy is walking from Yalbury to Mellstock when a gale of wind and rain begins. When the rain becomes too heavy, she seeks shelter in the cottage of Elizabeth Endorfield, who is believed by some villagers to be a witch. Welcomed inside, Fancy watches Elizabeth as she peels potatoes, but her mind is occupied with gloomy thoughts about her father's strong opposition to her marrying Dick. Fancy explains the situation to Elizabeth and asks for her advice. Elizabeth says that Fancy need to use common sense and change her father's mind. She whispers into Fancy's ear a course of action. Fancy promises to follow the advice. When the rain slows down, Fancy proceeds on her way.

### Notes

The autumn weather, with its severe rain and wind, reflects Fancy's gloomy mood and foreshadows turbulent times for the relationship between Dick and her. Fancy is so troubled by her father's refusal to let her marry Dick that she tells Elizabeth about it and asks her advice. Although Elizabeth is considered by some to be a witch or a "Deep Body," she gives Fancy practical advice. She tells the girl that she must use common sense to change her father's mind and whispers a course of action in Fancy's ear. Hardy creates suspense in the plot by not telling the reader what advice Fancy receives.

## Chapter 4

### Summary

Fancy follows Mrs. Endorfield's advice and makes it obvious that she is languishing from a broken heart.

Hearing about Fancy's poor condition, her father comes to visit her for tea and observes that she eats almost nothing. He later learns that she hardly bought any bread, butter, or meat in recent weeks.

Geoffrey goes to the schoolhouse a week later to check on his daughter and finds that Fancy has taken to bed. His heart melts on seeing his daughter's poor condition, and he tells Fancy that he will accept Dick as his son-in-law. He exhorts her to come with Dick for a visit the next day. Then on the way home, he calls upon the Dewys in their cottage. Grandfather William explains to Geoffrey that Dick has been moping and cheerless the past few days.

### **Notes**

More is learned about Geoffrey in this chapter. He is an essentially kind man and has a great deal of affection for his daughter. When he sees Fancy languishing of a broken heart, he cannot stand it and agrees that she can marry Dick. Following Mrs. Endorfield's advice has brought about the desired results for Fancy.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary**

Dick and Fancy's visit with Geoffrey is successful, and the couple seems blissfully happy. Fancy is particularly bright as Harvest Thanksgiving approaches; it is the day on which her organ playing will replace the choir. Dick is unable to attend the ceremony in Mellstock church because he has to attend a friend's funeral in another village. Fancy is very disappointed. Dick however, goes to the school to see Fancy before departing for the funeral. He is surprised to see her very dressed up and looking her best, almost like she did at the Christmas party. Dick is annoyed at the vanity of Fancy, who admits that she likes to attract attention. Dick advises her not to scandalize the vicar, but Fancy assures him that she knows better. In the end, she offers Dick a kiss and he forgives her.

At church, the members of the old Mellstock choir are seated in the nave with their wives, feeling awkward and out of place. They had wanted to stay away, but Grandfather William had insisted that they should not show resentment by being absent. When she arrives at church, Fancy becomes the centre of attention. Most of the women object to her fancy clothing, but the men admire her loveliness. Vicar Maybold, in particular, pays Fancy much attention; he seems to be smitten with love for her.

Fancy's organ performance is accomplished and impressive. The choir, however, thinks that such sophisticated music is not in tune with the simple old church.

### **Notes**

In this chapter, Fancy's vanity again causes problems for Dick. When he calls upon her before her organ performance, he finds her dressed in her best finery. He is in awe of her extraordinary beauty and thinks of her almost like a goddess. She seems a stark contrast to his earthly good sense and rustic appearance. When he realizes that Fancy, in her loveliness, will be at church without him, he grows uneasy. His worries intensify when she admits that she enjoys attracting attention. He thinks that she is too pre-occupied and self-centered about her job of playing the organ in church.

Dick's fears are well founded, for Fancy is the centre of attention at church. Even though the jealous women criticize her appearance, most of the men can barely keep their eyes off of her. Vicar Maybold is particularly smitten, which will cause Dick further problems. The choir also has a problem with Fancy. Having been replaced by her, they feel out of place and resentful as they sit in the nave. In fact, the choir members had wanted to stay away from church in protest, but the wise William had convinced them that it would be in poor

taste to openly show their resentment by being absent. It is not surprising that the displaced men of the choir criticize Fancy's accomplished performance, claiming that it seemed out of place in their little country church.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Summary**

Seated at a window of the schoolhouse later in the day, Fancy is thinking about the morning's success. She suddenly notices a wet and shabby Dick returning from the funeral. Fancy is not pleased to see him and does not invite him in. As Dick walks away, he notices another man knocking on her door; it is Maybold. When Fancy opens the door, the vicar, in a straightforward way, proposes to her. In the beginning, Fancy does not take him seriously, but he persists, trying to convince her of his sincere intentions. He praises her beauty and accomplishments; he also tempts her with offers of luxuries. Fancy tells Maybold that she needs time to think about his proposal and asks him to leave.

### **Notes**

The gloomy weather is a foreshadowing of trying times for Dick. Fancy, aglow in her earlier success at church, sees a wet Dick returning from the funeral. She is suddenly dissatisfied with him, judging him as shabby and plain. When he calls upon her, Fancy sends him away without inviting him in. As Dick departs, the vicar knocks on Fancy's door and proposes to her. At first, Fancy does not take him seriously; but he convinces her of his serious intentions and bribes her with thoughts of the luxuries he can provide her. Fancy listens to him and is swayed, for she does not tell him "no" or announce her engagement to Dick. Instead, she leads Maybold to believe that she will marry him. At the end of the chapter, the reader is left to wonder what this vain young lady will do about the vicar and Dick.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Summary**

The next morning Maybold writes a letter about Fancy to his friend in Yorkshire and decides to walk to Casterbridge to post the letter. Spying the vicar, Dick catches up with him. As they walk together, Dick explains why he has been absent from church the day before and expresses his regret at missing Fancy's performance. He also tells Maybold about his engagement to Fancy. Although he tries to hide his emotions, the vicar is shocked at Dick's revelation and cannot proceed; he spends time leaning on a bridge and watching the fish in the stream below. He then tears up the letter that he has written to his friend and throws it in the water.

Returning to the vicarage, Maybold writes a letter to Fancy, reproaching her for her dishonesty to Dick. Although he asserts his eternal love for her, he tells her that she must keep her promise to Dick and not disappoint the honest and trusting man. He gives the letter to a young boy to deliver to Fancy. Before the boy has time to reach the schoolhouse, the vicar receives a note from Fancy in which she confesses her dishonesty and her tendency to fall prey to flattery and temptations. She begs the vicar to release her from any obligation to him and asks him to keep the whole affair a secret. Maybold writes back to her, urging her to confess the incident to Dick and bring the whole affair to a close.

### **Notes**

The last crisis of the plot is resolved very quickly, and the way is cleared for the marriage of Dick and Fancy. When Maybold finds that Fancy is engaged to Dick, he is greatly upset and also disappointed in her dishonesty; she suddenly becomes only a woman, and not an idealized angel. He writes her a letter in which he confesses

his eternal love for her; but he also says that she needs to carry through with her promise to marry Dick, whom he describes as an honest and trusting man.

Fancy comes to her senses and realizes her true emotions are for the good and simple Dick. She may be flirtatious, vain and tempted by riches, but she is essentially a morally sound character with a strong set of values. As a result, she writes Maybold a letter, confessing her dishonesty and asking him to relieve her of any obligation to him. She also begs him to say nothing of the matter, for she does not want Dick to hear about it.

## **PART 5: Conclusion**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Summary**

This section of the book is set in summer, and the first chapter opens on Fancy's wedding day. The guests are assembled in Geoffrey Day's house, where half of the furniture has been removed. Mrs. Dewy and Mrs. Penny are helping Fancy to dress and trying to calm her nerves. The men tease the bride by telling stories of weddings where the groom did not show up. Nat Call, the best man, arrives and explains how Dick is held up because he had to hive a swarm of bees. He then describes all the work that he and Dick had done the previous day to arrange the new cottage. Finally, the groom arrives.

The old-fashioned country ceremony begins at the Day home; at first Fancy had wanted it to be more modern, but she gave in to the wishes of others. Thomas Leaf comes over to join in the festivities, even though he has not been invited; after some preliminary doubts, he is welcomed. Finally, the wedding procession marches off to the church, where the ceremony is performed. At its completion, the process moves around the parish, in accordance with the old country tradition. When they see Enoch, who is no longer working for Geoffrey, he is invited to join the procession; he declines, saying that he has a headache.

#### **Notes**

For the most part, the atmosphere and mood in this chapter is bright and cheery, for it is the wedding day of Fancy and Dick. Now that summer has returned, hope and happiness have replaced the sombre cold of winter. Dick has readied the cottage for his bride and himself, moving Fancy's half of the furniture there from the Day home. Additionally, Fancy seems to have mellowed. Although she is very nervous about the wedding festivities, she has yielded to those around her and agreed to an old-fashioned marriage ceremony, instead of the modern one she suggested.

There are a few hints in the chapter that the marriage between Fancy and Dick may have some problems. Although everything is cordial between the Days and the Dewys, it is still obvious that there is a gap in their social status, which could create tension in the marriage. Hardy comments that Fancy's eyes were "too refined and beautiful for a Tranter's wife." Additionally, Dick still remains practical and earthy; he is even late to arrive at the Days on his wedding day because he has paused to hive a swarm of bees. In contrast, Fancy seems to have grown more romantic, stroking Dick's back to feel whether he is real.

### **Chapter 2**

#### **Summary**

A space beneath a great Greenwood tree near Geoffrey's cottage has been cleared for dancing after the wedding. When the band assembles, a fine party begins. After the dance, supper is served indoors. Mrs. Day refuses to participate, cleaning her cupboards instead. After the meal, Fancy goes upstairs to get ready for departure, while Dick tries to put on the air of a married man. The guests agree that they are a well-matched pair

and can look forward to happy married life if they live within their means. Thomas Leaf is allowed to tell a pointless story of a man who grew rich.

Finally Fancy and Dick drive off to their new life together; it is appropriate that the moon is shining brilliantly. Dick attributes their happiness to the fact that they have no secrets from each other. Fancy agrees that from this day forward she will have no secrets from Dick; but there is one thing about the vicar that she will never tell her husband. As she pledges to keep this secret, a nightingale laughs in the background.

## Notes

The wedding celebration is held “Under the Greenwood Tree” at Yalbury; its lovely natural green beauty is a symbol of newness and growth, which the happily married couple is expected to experience together. Almost everything on this special occasion seems to be a perfect picture of pastoral, idyllic calm. It should be noted, however, that everything about the Greenwood tree is not perfect, for it has “quaint tufts of fungi” in the forks of its branches, suggesting sickness and decay. In the same manner, there are some suggestions of problems in the marriage. Fancy continues in her vain ways, constantly worried about her dress and appearance. She also prefers the modern to the old, while Dick is set in the traditional country ways.

The wedding celebration affords Hardy a final opportunity to paint a picture of the village rustics. As always, they enjoy each other’s company as they tell old stories in their country dialect; many are humorous tales about the unromantic aspects of marriage. Even Thomas Leaf, the uninvited guest, is allowed to tell a pointless story. The only cynical comment comes from Grandfather James, who says the couple will be happy they can find the time to sing without encumbrances of family life. It is also quite strange that Mrs. Day chooses to clean the cupboards rather than join in the celebration; it is obvious that she is not pleased over Fancy’s choice of a husband, for wealth is very important to her.

The very end of the novel also ends with a final hint of a problem. In the brilliant moonlight, Dick tells Fancy that they are so happy because they have no secrets from one another. Fancy promises herself from this day forward she will never hide another thing from Dick; but she also swears to keep one secret from him forever, obviously the one about the vicar’s proposal. As she vows to this dishonesty, a nightingale, typically a symbol of love, is laughing in the background.

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTERS

**Fancy Day** - Fancy, a lovely and intelligent young schoolteacher in Mellstock, is the protagonist of the novel. Although she grew up in this country village, she has become more modern and sophisticated than most of the village folk because of her education. Her real problem, however, lies inside herself, for she is vain and flirtatious, enjoying the attention she is paid by a variety of the men. During the novel, she also proves she is a bit fickle, not always true to her emotions and easily tempted by looks and luxuries.

Fancy can be a very determined woman. Once she decides that it is Dick that she wants to marry, she sets out to convince her father that he should grant his permission for the marriage. Until Geoffrey changes his mind about Dick, Fancy acts like she is heart-broken, refusing to eat and taking to the bed. Mr. Day cannot stand to see his daughter so unhappy and finally agrees to let her marry Dick, even though he feels like the young man is beneath her social status; it is even suggested that Fancy is too good for Dick, “too refined and beautiful” for this plain, down-to-earth country Tranter. It becomes obvious from where Fancy has gained her vanity.

Fancy also proves that she is not totally honest. Although she tells Dick that she enjoys attracting the attention of men, she fails to tell him about the vicar’s proposal. Even after their marriage, when he praises her for her

truthfulness, Fancy promises herself that she will never reveal this secret to Dick. In spite of such shortcomings, Fancy's morals are basically solid. As a result, she chooses the plain, practical Dick over Shiner and Maybold, both of whom could offer her more materialistic things in life.

In the novel, Fancy both changes things and is changed. Through the entire novel, she acts as an agent of disruption, presiding over the "fall" of an old order. It is she who dares to encourage her female students to sing along with the all-male choir; it is she who displaces the traditional all male choir with her organ music; it she who dares to wear bright, coloured festive clothing to church; it is she who dupes her father and gains his consent to marry beneath their social status. In the end, Fancy chooses the old, traditional country way of life for herself, selecting Dick for a husband over Shiner or Maybold. In so doing, she proves that she has become less vain; she has recognized that the really valuable things in life cannot be purchased, but must be earned and treasured. Fortunately, Fancy has realized that the kindness, goodness, and adoration of Dick are what she wants for a lifetime.

**Dick Dewy** - At the beginning of the novel, Dick appears as a carefree young man as he sings and walks round the lanes of Mellstock. He is judged by all to be simple-hearted and sincere; he is also a hard worker, helping his father, the Tranter, to deliver goods and packages. Like his father, he is very conservative and believes in the traditional country ways. He is also a key member of the men's church choir, playing instruments and singing.

From the first time that Dick sees the lovely Fancy Day, he falls deeply in love with her. Although he is basically shy and unsure of himself, he gathers his courage and asks her to dance at the annual Dewy Christmas party. He also finds himself growing jealous when she dances with other men, especially Farmer Shiner. After Christmas, he spends a great deal of time passing back and forth in front of the schoolhouse, hoping to see his true love. Finally she begins to acknowledge Dick, encouraging his love. Before long, they see one another on a regular basis, and in the spring, Dick asks her to become his wife, and Fancy agrees. Unfortunately, her father, Geoffrey Day, does not at first consent to the marriage. Fancy has to make him change his mind by showing him that she is broken hearted.

Throughout the novel, Dick is concerned about Fancy's vanity. He chides her for caring too much about her clothes and her appearance. He worries about her attracting attention to herself and flirting with other men. He also questions her modernity, somewhat resenting that her piano playing has ousted him, his male family members, and his male friends from the choir. In spite of her vain and fickle ways, Dick absolutely idolizes Fancy, almost like a goddess.

Unlike Fancy, Dick does not really change in the novel. He remains kind, good, sincere, faithful, trustworthy, and conservative throughout the story. Fortunately, Fancy matures enough to appreciate these characteristics and accepts Dick, in spite of his shabby plainness. Equally important is the fact that Geoffrey Day accepts Dick as a son-in-law, even though he knows the young man is beneath Fancy's social status.

**Reuben Dewy** - Reuben is the son of Grandfather William and the father of Dick. He supports the Dewy family by being a Tranter, delivering goods and packages to the people of Mellstock and neighbouring areas. Like his father and son, he also sings and plays instruments in the church choir. Also like his father and son, Reuben is fair-minded, hard-working, honest, and helpful. As a result, he is very well liked in the community.

Although Reuben is not wealthy, he is very generous. Each year he holds an annual Christmas party, and his home is a constant meeting place for friends and choir members. He is also known as a kind man, especially to people like Thomas Leaf, who is a weak-minded. He is also very kind to his wife, son, and father, all of whom he loves very much. When Grandfather William does not come to the Christmas party, Reuben goes to get him. When Dick falls in love with Fancy, Reuben tries to give his son sound advice. Such care and concern for others, coupled with his practicality and ability to compromise, make Reuben a natural leader whom most everyone in Mellstock respects.

**Grandfather William** - William Dewy, the representative of all the traditional Mellstock country values, is the leader of the men's choir. Throughout the book, he proves he is very sensitive to the deeper values of life. Whether in the case of Farmer Shiner's rude behaviour to the carol singers on Christmas Eve or of the choir wanting to boycott church on the day Fancy is to begin playing the organ, William Dewy always gives wise advice. William Dewy, the father of Reuben and grandfather of Dick, is portrayed as a kind, humorous, and sometimes melancholic man who firmly holds on to his religious faith. In many ways, he is like the Greenwood tree, strong and sure.

**Vicar Maybold** - Maybold is an enthusiastic, earnest, and typical young clergyman of the times. Without meaning to cause problems, he upsets the tradition of Mellstock with his new ideas. Additionally, his zealous approach is often tactless. Because he favours organ music, he decides to disband the age-old men's church choir, greatly upsetting most of his congregation. His parishioners also distrust his obvious attraction to Fancy Day. In spite of his shortcomings, Maybold is a very honourable man. After proposing to Fancy, he learns that Dick has already proposed. As a result, he chastises Fancy for her fickleness and advises her to live up to the first promise she has made, for Dick is a good and trusting man. By the end of the book, most of the rustics in the book have a more favourable opinion of their new vicar.

**Geoffrey Day** - Geoffrey, Fancy's father, is very concerned with wealth and social status. He has provided a good education for Fancy so that she can find a suitable husband, one who is a well-to-do landed gentleman. He encourages his daughter to be interested in Farmer Shiner, because of his wealth; he also at first refuses for her to marry Dick Dewy, for he is a poor Tranter, like his father. Geoffrey, however, cares about Fancy's happiness more than social status. When he sees his daughter acting broken hearted over not being able to marry Dick, he gives in and blesses the union.

**Farmer Shiner** - Frederic Shiner is a wealthy farmer, as well as the Churchwarden. Even though he is attracted to Fancy, she has no interest in him, for he is rough and rude, as seen in his treatment of the carollers on Christmas Eve. He proves, during the novel, that he thinks primarily of himself. Unconcerned about the feelings of the choir members, he supports replacing them with Fancy's organ playing; his sole motivation of promoting her is to gain her attention. In his pursuit of Fancy, he is determined to outshine Dick, whom he sees as his rival. When Fancy is stung by a bee, he rushes in and finds the antidote before Dick. He also has the benefit of being support by both Fancy's mother and father. In spite of everything he has and does, he loses Fancy to the more kind and practical Dick.

## **PLOT (Structure)**

*Under the Greenwood Tree* follows the classic pattern of plot development. The first part of the book, with its preoccupation with the affairs of the men's choir, is largely introductory. All of the major characters are seen or described, and the setting is clearly delineated. The rising action begins when several of the young Mellstock men take an active interest in Fancy Day, the new schoolmistress in town. Fancy is charmed by all the attention she receives and has trouble making up her mind which suitor is preferable. Most of the rising action centres on her encounters with her various suitors and her trying to decide which one to choose as a husband. She finally realizes that Dick is the best choice; then she must convince her father, Geoffrey Day, to accept him as well. Even after she had gained Geoffrey's approval to marry Dick, Fancy almost ruins everything. Since no one in Mellstock knows about the engagement of Dick and Fancy, Vicar Maybold proposes to Fancy. Flattered by the attention, Fancy indicates that she accepts the proposal. Now she is left to decide between Dick and Maybold. When she indicates her choice in a letter to Maybold, the climax occurs. The brief falling action centres on the preparation for the wedding of Dick and Fancy. The marriage ceremony and festivities form the denouement, or conclusion. The plot ends in comedy, as the newlywed couple rides off into the brilliant moonlight.

The novel is structured around the seasons of the year, with the sections being called spring, summer, fall, and winter. Since more than a year passes in the novel, it is not unified by time, even though the clear chronological

telling of events is never confusing. The plot is unified by setting and character. The entire story takes place in the small village of Mellstock and the surrounding countryside. Much of the action takes place at the schoolhouse and the homes of the Days and Dewys. The novel is also unified by the characters, for Fancy is the protagonist and central character, who holds the book together. Although she has three suitors (Dick, Shiner, and Maybold), they do not unduly complicate the plot. Fancy must simply mature and make the right decision, which she does in the end. The novel is also unified by the presence of the rustics and the constant theme of love.

## THEMES

**Major Theme** - The importance of finding true love is central to the entire novel. In fact, the whole plot revolves around Fancy Day choosing the right husband. Her father wants her to marry Farmer Shiner, because he is wealthy and landed. Fancy rejects him because he is rough and rude. Instead, she chooses Dick Dewey, a poor Tranter. Although he is a shy, modest, and retiring suitor, he proves that he is honest, faithful, trusting, and trustworthy. As a result, Fancy accepts his proposal and convinces her father to accept Dick as well.

The path of true love does not, however, run smoothly. Maybold, unaware of the engagement between Dick and Fancy, proposes to her as well and promises her a life of luxury. Fancy, flattered by the offer, is not strong enough to tell the vicar no. As a result, she must sort things out and make the right decision. Fortunately, true love prevails when she chooses the dependable Dick.

**Minor Themes** - People who are set in their ways find it very difficult to accept change. In the novel, all of the rustics, and particularly those in the Mellstock men's church choir, resist all new things. They are uncomfortable when a new vicar is appointed to lead their country congregation. When he announces that he will replace the music of the Mellstock choir with organ music, the members of the age-old choir are devastated and even talk about boycotting the church. The country rustics also have problems accepting Fancy Day's new, modern ideas. The women talk about her when she dares to wear bright, fancy clothing to church. The men are shocked when she encourages her female students to sing in church, for traditionally only men were allowed to make music. Although Dick is attracted to Fancy in spite of her modernity, he constantly tries to tone her down, suggesting that she not be flamboyant and try to flirt less. He also insists that their wedding ceremony follow the old country traditions. Because she loves Dick, Fancy agrees to put aside some of her newness for a while; the reader is led to believe that it will not last for long, for it is very difficult for people to change.

Accepting one's social position in life is another minor theme of the novel, closely tied to the major theme. Because of Fancy's education, her parents think that she should marry above her social status. In truth she is a country-girl of relatively humble parentage; therefore, Fancy is really appropriately suited to become Dick's wife, but her parents have given her loftier ideas. They have tempted her with thoughts of social advancement through marriage to a gentleman.

When Dick asks for Fancy's hand, he offers her true love. For Geoffrey Day, however, that is not enough for his daughter. He aspires for Fancy to marry into wealth and has supported Farmer Shiner's courting her. Fancy is not interested in him because of his crude behaviour. She is, however, tempted by Maybold's offers of luxuries if she marries him. Fancy admits that her nature is "forever fascinated with the idea of surroundings more elegant and pleasing than those, which have been customary."

Fancy is quite conscious of social position. Her father has progressed from ordinary keeper to become head gamekeeper and timber-steward to a great landowner. He is certainly a cut above Dick's father, who is the local delivery. Moreover, Fancy knows that she is more educated than Dick and could find a landed gentleman for a husband. In spite of the temptation of wealth, she fortunately decides to follow her heart and choose Dick even though he is one rung below her on the social ladder.

## OTHER ELEMENTS

***The Role of Chance*** - In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Hardy uses chance as a benevolent force. Dick happens to see Fancy in Budmouth and offers her a ride home; the rapport that is established between them during the journey starts their courtship. By chance, Fancy happens to know how to play the organ and can accommodate Maybold's desire to have organ music in church. Chance also brings Dick and Maybold together at a very opportune time, shortly after the vicar has proposed to Fancy. Unaware of Maybold's proposal, Dick tells him about his engagement to Fancy, squelching the vicar's hope of gaining her hand for himself. In these incidents and many others, Hardy shows that chance can bring good fortune.

***Imagery*** - The Repeated Image of the Mellstock Choir: Through the first half of the novel, the Mellstock Choir is a central image, whether its members are discussed by others or appear in person in the pages of the book. In truth, they become Hardy's symbol of the old, conservative, non-changing rustic way of life in the English countryside. Grandfather William is the key member of the choir. As the eldest male and the director of the group, he guides the choir and influences all of its members with his wise advice. For the most part, however, the choir members are presented in a light, humorous manner. They constantly fret about the fact that the new vicar is replacing their music with organ music, played by a female. They are so upset by the turn of events that they threaten to boycott church on the day that Fancy begins her organ playing. Only William saves the day. After the choir is disbanded, the choir as an entity is not important, but the individual members, such as Tranter Dewy and Thomas Leaf, continue to hold importance.

***Hardy's Descriptive Language*** - Hardy's imagery is brought to life by its vivid descriptions, filled with similes and metaphors. He scatters word pictures over his pages with a youthful delight. His images are noted for the sudden comparison of normally unrelated objects. For example: "All glances present converged like wheel-spokes upon the boot in the centre of them," or "The limp rasher hung down between the bars of the gridiron like a cat in the child's arms," or Mrs. Crumpler's dancing was like "she rolled on castors," or "Ends of tunes sprang up in her minds like mushrooms." The dance at the Tranter's is also described in lively detail. For example: "The ear-rings of the ladies now flung themselves wildly about, turning violent summersaults, banging this way and that, and then swinging quietly against the ears sustaining them." The finest comparison in the novel, however, is that of the Greenwood tree, with its beauty and unchanging nature; throughout the novel, it is a symbol of the community that surrounds it.

***Hardy's Use of Dialogue*** - According to Hardy, "the whole secret of a living style and the difference between it and the dead style, lies in not having too much style." Hardy's style in this novel triumphs in its realistic dialogue. The conversations between the rural characters are marvellous and filled with colloquial ease and conversational idiom. Mr. Spinks' description of cider to the other rustics is priceless: "Such poor liquor do make a man's throat feel very melancholy-and is a disgrace to the name of stimmilent." Such fresh and charming humour and dialect are found throughout the book.

***The Title of the Novel*** - Hardy took the title of the book from Shakespeare's romantic comedy, *As You Like It*. The title reminds the reader that the novel is really a pastoral idyll whose rural Mellstock setting has similarities to the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's play. The tree, in its beauty and timelessness, becomes a symbol for the natural, rustic society that surrounds it.

Both Shakespeare and Hardy blend their respective love stories with seasonal activities. As a result, the reader sees everything in the play and the novel in terms of a benevolent nature enveloping, urging and shaping the story's outcome. Both in Shakespeare's play and in Hardy's novel, the actions of the characters are closely tied to rural activities, like country dances and community living. In both the works, music and song also play an important role in the life of the community. Hardy's novel opens with the choir and their carolling. Music and

dancing are also an integral part of the Tranter's Christmas party. In both Shakespeare and Hardy, love, laughter and song are important elements of pastoral romance.

***Under the Greenwood Tree as "a lyric poem"*** - *Under the Greenwood Tree* has often been described as "a lyric poem about Dorsetshire," the area in which Hardy grew up. In the novel, Mellstock is clearly a description of an imaginary village in Dorsetshire. The Tranter's cottage, described in artistic detail, is a picture of the Hardy family's own home. The keeper's house in Yalbury Wood is similarly authentic. Hardy also brings the rustic characters to life with similar realistic and vivid detail. They are pictured as they drink cider by blazing firesides, sing carols in the frosty night, gather around a Christmas tree with family and friends, and dance at a wedding. In this happy novel, Hardy idealizes country life, in spite of the breath-taking cold and biting poverty.

The lyric nature of Hardy's description is established early in the novel as he describes a typical winter scene: "At the passing of the breeze, the fir trees sob and moan no less distinctly than the rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quivering; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall." Amidst the icy cold, a warm love story begins to take shape. In the spring and summer, when the "damp slopes of the hill-sides . . . steam in the warmth of the sun," the love between Fancy and Dick intensifies. Autumn then comes with mellowness, as their love matures and becomes sure of itself. Some new challenges arrive in the winter, before the wedding in the spring. Fancy's marriage to Dick is preceded by an idyllic and lyrical picture of the month of May in the woodlands. At the wedding, there is also a poetic description of the marriage procession. It goes "among dark perpendicular firs, like the shafted columns of a cathedral . . . through a hazel copse matted with primroses and wild hyacinths . . . under broad beeches in bright young leaves." The lyric setting includes the inhabitants and the continuing life of the countryside.

## QUESTIONS

1. Fully describe the setting of the novel. How are the characters a product of this setting?
2. Fully describe Fancy's character and upbringing.
3. Compare and contrast Fancy's three suitors in the novel. What does she like and dislike about each of them?
4. Compare and contrast Tranter Dewy and Geoffrey Day.
5. Describe Grandfather William and explain why he is so important to the novel.
6. Give specific examples from the novel that show Hardy's deep interest in the old customs and traditions of the Dorsetshire countryside.
7. Explain what happens to the Mellstock choir in the book. What does this symbolise about country life?
8. Fully explain how the plot is developed and resolved.
9. What are two of the themes of the novel and how are they developed?
10. Explain Hardy's use of imagery and language in the novel.